Between Allah and me

God is the judge

“Speak the truth even if it’s bitter”
- The Prophet Muhammad, Hadith 1370

An ethnographic study of homosexuality within Islam

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to look into the issues one might encounter as a gay and lesbian Muslim with especial focus on the individual experience. I was interested in analyzing the dynamics of one's sexual identity interconnecting with one's religious identity with the assistance of identity theory, personality and culture concepts. I interviewed three different individuals who are all practicing Muslims and live openly as gay in their community, and gathered secondary resources to gain insights from gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims from other communities. The research disclosed individuals’ perceptions on the legitimacy of homosexuality in Islam and their lived experiences regarding their sexuality and the role their culture has played.

Keywords: homosexuality, Islam, Quran, gay, lesbian, identity, transgender, LGBT.
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1. Introduction
1.1 Background
Religion and homosexuality have been seen as incompatible to one another throughout time. In some religious communities, relevant progress has already been made with churches and synagogues that are inclusive for homosexuals, although, in Islamic communities progress is still lingered (Siraj 2012). The idea of homosexuality is rather sensitive in the Arab-Islamic world and it is often considered taboo and “haram” (prohibited). Between 1500 and 1800 the reality was other, sex and love affairs between same sex partners were socially acceptable. At the time, same sex acts punishments and permissions varied depending on its purpose and reasoning in Islamic Law (El-Rouayheb 2005). This point will be further developed in chapter 5.

The word “homosexuality” didn’t exist in the Islamic world until the westernization and modernization in the 19th century (El-Rouayheb 2005). The concept was firstly employed as a medical term and later as a term to describe sexuality in natural or unnatural ways by Christians in Europe (Rozehnal 2004). By contrary, Quranic discourse doesn’t refer to homosexuality in unnatural terms but it has followed the lead of Christians in assigning and adapting meanings of right and wrong in Quranic stories. Currently, homosexuality in Islamic Law is not allowed and thus, many leaders from the Muslim community openly condemn for it.

One clear example is the Muslim Council in Britain which continues to refuse any engagement with LGBT organizations or participation in projects to tackle homophobia within the Muslim community (Siraj 2012:450). LGBT activists note that this kind of view hardens the struggle lived by the LGBT Muslim youth with their sexual identity, even more, it encourages the prolongation of forced marriages, depression and suicide attempts (Shah 2016:309). Not least, the view of Islam as a homophobic religion that leaves not room for gay and lesbian Muslims.

Due to this repudiation, several gay and lesbian Muslim organizations have been established around the world to offer a platform of support and acceptance for LGBT Muslims but the struggle is arduous, complex and still remains. In particular, three exceptional cases serve to praise this struggle but for the interest of this study they also help to explore the possible relation between religious identity and sexual identity and the dynamics within it, in more general terms, to offer an insight to this struggle through research terms.
One case concerns the first openly gay imam in the U.S.A; Daayiee Abdullah, who operates a mosque, directed to LGBT Muslims in Washington D.C under the name “The Light of Reform”. In Khan (2013), Abdullah claims that it is humans and their direct relationship with god that establishes their true faith and helps to reconcile such a relationship. A second case concerns the first openly gay imam in France; Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed, who also operates an inclusive mosque in Paris for gay Muslims. In Banerji (2012), Zahed claimed that many LGBT Muslims do not feel comfortable going to other mosque due to the fear of being recognized or looked at, and thus, having a place where to pray peacefully help them reconcile both identities. Actions taken by Abdullah and Zahed are crucial for advancing and creating a possible world for LGBT Muslims despite negative reactions from parts of the Muslim community and other imams.

However, the relationship in question is not as straightforward. Younger generations of Muslims growing up in a western society face a severe conflict between sexual identity and religious identity in relation to contexts of family and community where an inclusive mosque is not the main environment of acceptance. Therefore it is important to add to this study a structural concept of culture that helps us examine such a relationship. In a third case, Shanon Shah (2016) in constructing an alternative pedagogy of Islam sets focus on how LGBT Muslims choose to create a more inclusive interpretation of Islam by methods of awareness. He examines how a group of gay and lesbian Muslims initiate a project that offers a space for discussion on Islamic teachings in order to highlight pro-LGBT interpretations of Islam and introduces the idea that diversity exists within Islam and that it helps practitioners to reconcile on a personal level (Shah 2016:309-317). So that, it is of importance to trace to which extend personality affects this relationship as well.

As Shah’s study, all three cases demonstrated the positive effects triggered by a platform of support; however, the discussion on homosexuality remained on justifications found in the Quran and Islamic Law, as well as, their interpretations of homosexuality likewise the majority of studies in the relation between Islam and homosexuality (Kugle 2010).
In the following analysis, I will attempt to analyze the relationship of these identities by examining interpretations of homosexuality at the individual level through their experiences. By narrating the experiences of Muslims who identifies themselves as gay and lesbians, we will be able to differentiate the nuances of Islam in regards the interpretation of homosexuality and how they reconcile their gay and lesbian identity. The cases above revealed a variable of cultural context and personality that I believe is worth for further analysis. Hence, we will gain direct access to the life and struggle one might encounter as a gay and lesbian Muslim with a view on cultural aspects. The study will explore this relationship within a pertinent theoretical framework.

1.2 Research Problem and Research Questions
In this sense, the purpose of this study is to focus on the problematic of one's sexual identity interconnecting with one's religious identity studied from the individual level. In practice, I will investigate whether gay and lesbian Muslims can find a platform in which these two identities interact, reconcile or conflict and if they are able to live out both identities. An analytical description of how they are able to harmonize these two identities and how they justify their overall identity in regards Islam.

Homosexuality has often been considered a problem of the west that was infiltrated in the Muslim world (Whitaker, 2016). Therefore, it is relevant to consider in our study the role played by the social context that surrounds Muslims, in specific, the impact of culture related to personality and identity. Claiming an identity is important because it helps individuals to describe who they are, their personality, and identify themselves with certain communities. If that cultural practice, community or environment is in conflict with the personal identities of lesbians and gay Muslims, it is then relevant to analyze the implications of that relationship. And from that point, attempt to draw generalizations based on that external cultural influence.

In the general sense, this study aims to depict the issues of religion and sexuality within Islam. First, by offering a conceptual review of Islamic Jurisprudence, and second, in the light of our research inquiry, by gathering the insights of Muslims on their own faith of Islam and what it represents according to them. So, it is shown how these definitions relate to life and the community after making the choice of whether ‘coming out’ or not.
This study draws upon interviews made with two different imams that both openly came out as gay Muslims and created communities and mosque that were inclusive, and a scholar named Shanon Shah who is openly gay and who himself highlights this issue with frequency. I will conduct interviews with; scholar Shanon Shah, first American gay imam Daayiee Abdullah and first French gay imam Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed. Furthermore, I will include material from previous interviews with gay and lesbian Muslims who both took the decision to come out as gay and lesbian for their family and community and the ones that choose not to. I will also engage in a forum on the website LGBT Muslims where people anonymously post messages and discuss with others in order to see if there is a common factor within the Muslim community or if the choices differ when it comes to one's sexual identity and relationship towards Islam. Thus, I will work on the following questions:

*How does one cope with life as a practicing gay and lesbian Muslim and what are the issues of one's sexual identity interconnecting with one's religious identity?*

*How do they argue for that homosexuality is legitimate within Islam?*

*Is there a difference between the male and female sexuality within Islam?*

*Is there a difference in living openly as a gay Muslim in the western world and to which extend one context is easier than the other?*
2. Previous research

2.1. Islam and homosexuality

Several studies have been made on the subject of Islam and homosexuality. However, this majority are a representation of a trend of studies that bases their main arguments in the teachings of the Quran and what the Quran states about it. This is to say that, they are juxtaposed to the ideas presented in the Quran and therefore, there is a lack of focus on how the phenomenon is explained from the individual level and their experience which is the reason of this study. For the purpose of this essay, three studies are relevant to illustrate advances made in the subject and to make evident the importance of this inquiry.

Firstly, in a study carried out by Asifa Siraj with title; “I Don't Want to Taint the Name of Islam”: The Influence of Religion on the Lives of Muslim Lesbians. Siraj interviewed anonymously lesbian Muslims, gathered their stories, and demonstrated how Islam acted as a crucial tool that aided to further understand individual's sexuality. In this study, female participants were interviewed entirely through email and in a platform available by the British LGBT organization Imaan. The research revealed then that by conceptualizing their identity within an inclusive framework, it was possible to help participants to feel that they also belonged to Islam (Siraj 2012:462). The results showed that despite a challenging relationship with Islam, participants could overcome difficulties by relying on their membership to a community named Imaam.

In a second study by Scott Kugle and Stephen Hunt under the name: Masculinity, Homosexuality and the Defence of Islam: A Case Study of Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s Media Fatwa, it is examined how neo-traditionalists of the Islamic community employed misinterpretations of certain beliefs and symbols to justify social inequalities but most importantly as ways to awaken homophobia (Kugle Hunt, 2012). The example of Al-Qaradawi, a popular traditionalist of the Arab world, shows clearly how discourses influence Muslim minorities in the West. In their research, Kugle and Hunt contradict his claims and reveal that neither gender inequalities nor homophobia have their origin in Islam contrary to Al Qaradawi’s claim. They further conclude that his discourses misrepresent homosexual Muslims, misunderstand the concept of sexual orientation, and even threaten his own defense of patriarchal masculinity. In
effect, this was itself an injustice to Islamic traditions which he defends (Kugle Hunt 2012:278). Moreover, Kugle studies even further other aspects in *Homosexuality in Islam, critical reflections on gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims* (2010), where a closer theological perspective is made by analyzing the different texts from Islamic jurisprudence and the Hadith.

A final study examining general perceptions of homosexuals within an Islamic community pertains to Elsje Bonthuys and Natasha Erlank, who conducted a study in the South African Muslim community in Johannesburg. The research, *Modes of intolerance, South Africa Muslims and same sex relationships* examines whether the different attitudes towards homosexuality within a non homosexual Muslim community have concordance with common assumptions from the western world (Bonthuys Erlank 2012:270). As a conclusion they found that behaviors towards gays and lesbians were labeled as moderate. This was mainly based on the strong desire by the participants to not know about sexual transgressions but also the fact that negative attitudes did not translate directly into actions (Bonthuys Erlank 2012:270). It also indicated that the perceptions towards same sex relationships were inconsistent and varied according to the relationship between the respondent and the people who were practicing same sex relationships.

In summary, these studies highlighted the latest views on the subject. In the first study, it is discovered that a belonging to the community Imaan as a tool helped participants to cope with homosexuality. Then, it is claimed that some relevant actors have the power to influence beliefs and misinform the Muslim community and therefore, creates equivocate misinterpretations, beliefs and phobias which hardens the struggle of Muslim LGBT community. And last, it is shown how other Muslims community perspectives can differ according to a context and the level of proximity of a homosexual situation.

All these ideas were examined in a general framework of how the Quran will explain them. Due to the complexity of this conceptualization, they will be disclosed in the following section (Chapter 5). For this study, the above developments represent two important reasons to continue the study of Islam and homosexuality. One meaning that focusing on the Quran disregards other explanations and insights of LGBT Muslims on homosexuality that can expand knowledge and understanding. This essay will fill in that gap by analyzing these insights departing from the private sphere, with experiences and the personality aspect. Second, the studies above revealed
that there is a powerful force within communities that can support, facilitate, or endanger life for LGBT Muslims. In this sense, this study will also contribute by providing an analysis where LGBT Muslims perceptions are exposed in regards the role of culture in this context and what culture means. With these thoughts on identity and culture at the agent and structure level, I see the necessity to develop further research and to present them from a more theoretical stand.
3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Identity theory

I have chosen identity theory and the anthropological concepts of culture and personality to aid my research in the comprehension of how sexual and religious identities interact in regards LGBT Muslims. I will employ identity theory because it allows me to provide a detailed understanding of roles and meanings that individuals assigned to their identity; it helps to demonstrate how these meanings constitute identities, and therefore their motivations for actions and choices. Identity theory is a social and structural psychological theory which seeks to explain the identities that we claim and how these identities also relate to others (Burke, Stets 2009). For instance, identity theory looks into answer questions such as: What are the sources of our judgments when it comes to interaction in society and what are the consequences of these interactions and behaviors we encounter?

Identity theory states that the nature of an individual's identity is an extract of the society they live in and decisions made by individuals are eloquent with these conceptions of identities, instead of an identity accommodating to external and uncontrollable situations (Burke, Stets 2009). As an example, being a student is an identity that one has, simultaneously, as one might belong to a certain religious identity and the community of that religion. We then have two identities that shape us to how we are and how they all function at many levels. All individuals are constituted of multiple identities and according to which extend these identities rely and depend on society; individuals will be able to live out their identity.

I employ identity theory, with the purpose to comprehend cases of gay, transsexual and lesbian Muslims in concern to their sexual identity interconnecting with their religious identity. The idea is to deepen in the structural identities of these individuals to reveal the manners in which they reconcile the different identities and the how. Burke and Stets (2009) affirms that if support exists on behalf of society and the identity claimed is recognized then we will live out that identity. The weakness of using identity theory is the nature of the broadness that it contains when generalizing certain issues. For instance, in the assumption that individuals lacking support towards one identity will push it away and focus on another identity (Burke, Stets 2009). In my opinion, the issue of Islam and
homosexuality is more complex than that and also one's ability to actually ignore an identity that one has. In this case, some theorists have developed further notions of identity theory that are of benefit for this study.

3.2 Role identity
According to the positions we hold in society, our identities are defined and everything from our behaviors, thoughts, feelings, etc, are therefore influenced. These positions are defined as normative categories because they are loaded with social values and expectations that individuals are supposed to activate and live up to them in their roles in society. This concept refers to “the meanings people attribute to themselves while in various roles (one’s role identity), and these meanings are distinct from the behaviors people enact while in these roles” (Burke, Stets 2009:2). It is how we like to think about ourselves being and acting as an agent part of a structural and cultural society and how our behavior corresponds to this environment.
Burkes (2009, 3-4) further affirms that; “the idea that people’s location in the social structure—the roles they assume—importantly shape how they see themselves and how they behave. A role is the set of expectations tied to a social position that guide people’s attitudes and behavior”.
One part of the meanings of role identity originates from what individuals learn from socializations and the expectations of others in regards these roles, while the other perspective is obtained from our own interpretations associated to the role.

All these normative institutions in the social culture affect tremendously the self and one's identity and behavior. This influence creates a variety of values but also of priorities which according to Sheldon Stryker one of the originators of identity theory will be evidence in a salience hierarchy of identities (Burke, Stets 2009). This is to say that, we have multiple identities which are organized subconsciously in a hierarchy according to their relevance. He suggests that the idea of salience hierarchy refers to how ready we are as humans to act upon our identity when coming across a situation that influences us (Burke, Stets 2009).
3.3 What is Culture?

In general terms, that structural and social influence becomes what from now on we will refer as culture. Culture is then central to the formation of identity, that is why, a closely examination is necessary to the initial presence of culture in individual's identities and then to the traces found in people’s actions. In other words, the objective is to show evidence of individual's behavior in which a relation between culture and identity is possible and how this relationship develops according to identity theory. Humans have three key areas that shape the overall sense of human being which are ideology, love and work, and these are all structured as one function where culture and one's identity are bound to each other (Schwartz Luyckx, Vignoles 2011:286).

When discussing the concept of culture it exist a broad connotation due to the multiple factors that constitutes it. I consider important to explain the context in which I will be using it for my study. More specifically, culture begins to refer to the environments that humans are first born into and those environments we adapt to in the society we belong. To these events, the theorists refer to primary and secondary socialization accordingly. This means that we will first be exposed and then adapted to the culture that our parents give us as children, being their own culture. This includes everything from the religious beliefs we will have or perhaps the absence of any religious beliefs, to different values (Schwartz Luyckx, Vignoles 2011). However, there are other factors influencing our identities and the behaviors accountable to them which identity theory tackles on through culture but doesn’t reach to explain. It is therefore that I have added personality as a concept that could give us with more insights. Personality is embedded in the individual's decision system and can also influence our identity. We will study this concept only in relationship to culture and not as a whole, in fact, the personality types or models could be used as a suggestion for further studies to examine a complete impact on identity. With this in mind, I found it suitable to include culture and personality as a part of my theoretical framework.
3.4. Culture and personality

Culture and personality looks into the interaction between our psychological aspects and the culture. This concept therefore claims that our personality as adults characterizes cultural institutions as religion, and that our socialization creates different patterns within our personality (Kelly Chao Scruggs Lawrence, Snow 2009). It aims to examine how our different socialization practices can give results of different types of personalities. When forming a cultural identity this involves steps such as adopting the beliefs and practices of one or more cultural communities.

When we adopt a certain belief we need to make choices about the culture that one can identify with, and that way continue on forming a cultural identity (Schwartz Luyckx, Vignoles 2011:286). The cultural identity that we obtain can also involve certain risks, one of them can be age gaps in families between the young and the old which means that a change within the culture may occur based on a new generation where the views for example for a child will be different than the one from his or her parents. These risks can also involve adapting to a second culture in the case of moving to a new country. The individuals who are included in this study are finding themselves in between cultures as I focus on the ones that has grown up with one culture from their parents and also obtain the culture from the society they currently find themselves in, which is different from the one they got from their parents. In today's globalized world forming a cultural identity has become more complex as we are exposed to several at the same time that can create difficulties to find which one to belong to (Schwartz Luyckx, Vignoles 2011:286).

In the conceptualizations of culture and personality there are two notions that are of importance for our study. Personality mediation is the notion suggested by Abram Kardiner and Ralph Linton which claims that our environments affects our primary institutions, this is to say, subsistence and the settlement patterns of a society (Kelly Chao Scruggs Lawrence, Snow 2009). Once the primary patterns of society are affected, a chain of effects are triggered in the levels of a personality ladder or structure, to the point that personality affects secondary institutions, such as religion. In this sense, personality is considered a variable that intervenes by creating effects in other institutions of importance.

The second notion is that of a two-system view developed by Inkeles, Levinson and Melford Spiro. This notion presents the interaction between socio cultural institutions and personality in more equal terms. The relationship is one of interdependence where personality is affected due to
the interactions of culture and socializations and vice versa. Each society has their own culture and history, and with the fact of culture influencing our way to socialize one should not assume that general patterns govern how cultures form (Kelly Chao Scruggs Lawrence, Snow 2009).

Personality, culture and identity are binding concepts that for this type of study cannot be dissolved or examined separately. By contrary is due to this interrelation or dependence that we will be able to provide a comprehensive analysis of the psychology and dynamics among identities of gay, lesbian and transsexual Muslims. Thus, these complementing notions are suitable to help us answer the research questions.
4. Islamic concepts and jurisprudence

4.1. Homosexuality

I will start this chapter by describing the concept of homosexuality and how it will be further used throughout my research. I will then follow up on the Islamic jurisprudence and the different schools of thoughts within Islam and I will conclude the chapter with the term homosexuality within the Islamic world and how it has been seen within society. This is of importance to cover as they define the punishment and act of homosexuality in slightly different ways. It is further important to understand the concept and words used within the laws as the individuals in the interviews frequently uses these term when they talk about Islam. I also found it to be important to describe the concept of homosexuality as this can differ between individuals and how one interprets the word and its meaning.

When it comes to the question of sexuality and gender identities the research has the focus on homosexual Muslims, gay men and lesbian women but also a few individuals who are transgender. The word gay meaning a man who also identifies himself as a man and feel attraction towards other men. The word lesbian means women who also identifies themselves as women and feel attraction towards other women. These are defined as our sexual orientations, no matter if one chooses to act upon it or not (Kugle Hunt 2012:260). It is important to know that one might not accept their sexual orientation as a part of their identity or personality. Human’s levels of acceptance for oneself are affected by many other factors surrounding us. These factors can be our culture, religion, society, the political system and our family and friends. I will continue using the term gay for men and lesbian for women throughout my study and in a general term I will be using the term homosexuality and the initials of LGBT which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. The reason for that I want to use the terms gay and lesbian rather than homosexuality is because it’s important to highlight the difference one might encounter between being homosexual as a female contrary to being a homosexual as a man, specifically within Islam or when discussing homosexuality in the context of religion in general. Transgender does not follow under the term homosexuality as homosexuality stands for an individual who has attraction to someone from the same gender. Being a transgender means an individual who identifies themselves with a gender that they did not have from birth and therefore might be physically born as a male but identifies themselves as
a woman (Kugle Hunt 2012). It is for that reason that I will also be referring to the term LGBT, because by also using the term of LGBT I am able to speak in a general matter of all the different sexual identities that is being represented in my study.

4.2. Islamic schools of thoughts
The religion of Islam consists of a so called Islamic Law that is called Sharia which means *the path to follow god's law* (Alarefi 2009:708). This law is supposed to guide the individual regarding the daily matters, for example when it comes to a person's hygiene, diet, sexual relations and rules of how to pray and so on. The purpose of the law is also used in situations of guiding people's behaviors. Further on within Islam there are different schools of thoughts meaning schools that interpret the Islamic laws in different ways. Even though there are different schools within Islam the majority of the Islamic jurist have agreed on that there are four main sources of Islamic laws to be found and to follow (Alarefi 2009:709).

The first one to follow and also the one considered being the main source from which all Islamic law derived from is *the book of the holy Quran*, within the Quran one can find rules regarding the Islamic faith, ethical rules and practical rules. According to many Muslims this is also the one you first need to turn to if you wish to learn about Islamic legislation (Alarefi 2009). The second main source of legislative rules after the Quran is the Sunnah (Tradition), the Sunnah works as a support for the Quran and also agreement to what is laid down within the Quran. The third and fourth source are the Ijma (Consensus) and the Qiyas (Analogy), these ones can be used in a settlement between two issues. It is suppose to help the individual to establish and obtain a decision, making a comparison in order to gain equality between the two matters.

These four main sources of Islamic law have been used and interpreted in different ways by different schools of thoughts.

There are four different schools of thoughts, the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi and Hanbali schools of jurisprudence.

When it comes to the basic principal of these schools there is not any differences to be found. Where they differ is their interpretation and application of the individual elements of the religion. This means that they show different local and orthodox methods in their responses. Every school depends on the Quran and Sunnah for the knowledge but where they differ is in the use of Ijma
and Qiyas, on how to solve legal dispute within the Islamic society and punishment (Alarefi 2009:718). I will continue by presenting the four different schools and what the punishment for homosexuality is within each school.

*The Hanafi School* is considered being the first school of jurisprudence and is mostly dominated in family and religious laws amongst the Muslims of Balkan, Pakistan, India, Central Asian republic and China. Within the Hanafi school there is no physical punishment for being a homosexual (Alarefi 2009). *The Maliki School* is considered being the second Islamic school of jurisprudence. This school differs from the others by its use of the derivation of rulings. All though the school uses the Quran, Sunnah and Qiyas it uses the practices of *the people of Medina* as a source instead of the Ijma. This is because its founder, Malik Bin Anas was born in the city of Medina (Alarefi 2009:719). This school of thought is dominated in Algeria, Libya and Morocco. The Maliki school consider homosexuality being an act of punishment but it requires four male witnesses if one is going to be charged with the act of homosexuality. *The Shafi School* is the third school of Islamic jurisprudence that also came from the city of Medina as the Maliki School. Its founder, Muhammad Bin Adris as Shafi was an expert in the Hanafi and Maliki schools, he was influenced by them and developed his own thoughts and interpretations of their teachings before he created his own independent school (Alarefi 2009:720). This school is mainly found in Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Malaysia, Indonesia and East Africa. As with the Maliki school the thoughts of Shafi is that homosexuality is an act that needs to be punished but also requires four male witnesses. The last school of jurisprudence is the *Hanbali School*. This school differs from the others as it has a lot more focus and emphasis on the Quran and Sunnah and is in less favor of the Qiyas and Ijma. They are also known for having fewer followers and have a special influence in Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Alarefi 2009:721). This school of thoughts is the one with strictest laws and interpretations when regarding homosexuality.

To be punished for homosexuality the same rule applies as to the other two schools, four male witnesses are needed and punishment can be warranted with death penalty.

One of the greatest importances when it comes to the question of homosexual act within all Islamic schools of thoughts is the one of morality. An interesting notion is that the punishment is given in the case of that someone has seen the act (as according to three of the schools) and it is
therefore given for the act of homosexuality in public (El-Rouayheb 2005). One can by looking at the varieties of punishment and question of morality interpret the law in different ways.

4.3.1 Homosexuality in the Islamic world
Affairs between men have throughout the Arab Islamic history been seen as something socially accepted and something frequently done, if not done in public (El-Rouayheb 2005). As mentioned earlier the word homosexuality did not exist in the Quran, but in order to condemn it, the story of the people of Lut was used for this purpose and can be found in the Quran (Zahed 2013:9). This tells the story of the two cities Sodom and Gomorrah where the people had turned away from god and instead started worshiping a god of war and destruction. It describes how foreignersvisit the people of Lut who then upon arrival get stolen and raped, by the men of Lut. This has then been interpreted as a homosexual act between men and thereafter condemned homosexuality (Zahed 2013). The story’s interpretation has varied among Muslims and the different schools of thoughts and it is evident that a majority has inclined for an explanation based on a homosexual act.

Some religious scholars have explained the acts of sodomy within the people of Lut as a way to drive strangers away from their land. This is based on the early description about battles in the Arabic world where the goal was to make their enemies suffer and to “make courageous men into women” (El-Rouayheb 2005:15). The meaning of making a man into a woman is the act of penetration which is seen as dominating and subjugating another person (El-Rouayheb 2005:13). It is with this view that homosexuality between two women and lesbianism is not mentioned within the Quran, the illegal act of homosexuality is the one of penetration.
In Islamic law the word “luti” can be translated to “pederast” which means a man who commits the sodomy act of “liwat” intercourse with another man (El-Rouayheb 2005:16). The word luti has arisen from the story of the people of Lut. In the early history a medical explanation or psychological one did not exist for homosexual act but was something that arrived in the early Ottoman period.
During the Ottoman period homosexual relations was first seen as something that involved an adult man with an adolescent boy. Looked through in the cultural and social sense this was accepted based on the biological differences between the two males (El-Rouayheb 2005). Since the adolescent boy was not yet a man, this was not considered a faulty act or act of homosexuality. What made a boy into a man was the cultural importance of having a beard. The beard symbolized male honor and slaves was for example not allowed to have a beard (El-Rouayheb 2005:26). Ones a boy grew a beard it was no longer acceptable to have a relationship between the two men, and his entrance into the adult world was always celebrated. Sexuality is also something that is continuously mentioned as an act made upon by men and not by women. A woman's sexuality is only viewed as the one she has with her future husband in other to reproduce (El-Rouayheb 2005).

A continuing notion about homosexuality when looking through the general Islamic world is how it is seen solely as an act which individuals may or may not chose to act upon. It is not considered a part of a human's identity (El-Rouayheb 2005). With the view of homosexuality being a matter of behavior it means that it can be changed as human’s changes behaviors that are seen as bad for them to keep. If one views homosexuality as a part of that individual's identity then the question of being cured is no longer valid.

As ideology being one of the key areas that shapes us as humans this can have a large effect upon how a gay or lesbian Muslim might chose to view their sexual orientation. If the Islamic society does not recognize homosexuality as being an identity the individual might not recognize him or herself with this identity even though they are gay or lesbian.
4.3.2 Traditional Muslim identity

When talking about the general traditional Muslim identity it is believed that Muslims share all aspects of the Islamic culture. This includes anything from dress code, their names and drinking habits (Kabir 2010:6). The most important elements that they have in common are the religion itself and the belief of Allah. The Quran provides the same message for all Muslims, but the interpretation of the message will differ between the Muslim groups and also based on the different levels of meaning to the text (Kabir 2010). Within this traditional view it also includes belonging to an Islamic community, most likely a specific mosque to which one goes to for prayer and guidance. The traditional Muslim identity can therefore be put in contrast to identity theory in general within the analysis.
5. Methodology

5.1 Methodology

I will be conducting this research by doing a qualitative analysis using an ethnographic method. This ethnographic method assists in the systematic study of individuals and cultures which makes it essential for this type of research. Ethnography that is an anthropological research method aims to look at the society and the individuals from their own point of view with the purpose of finding an understanding of a culture, a way of living or perhaps a certain behavior within some individuals (Russell 2011). This is based on that ethnography claims that researchers have to discover what it is that people actually do before trying to interpret their actions through filters from their own personal experiences (Lecompte Schensul 2010:2).

Therefore, with my aim to understand the life of gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims I find this method being the most valuable in order to answer my research questions.

The main use of ethnographic methods has been done by doing field work and observations but has in later years come to being used within various ways and works well when conducting online interviews (Russell 2011). When looking into the life and culture of others one needs to have the amount of information needed, and as ethnography requires large material I have done a combination with the interviews I have conducted myself with interviews done by others (Russell 2011). Bias issues that can arise when doing an ethnographic study is getting the wrong answers by forming the questions in ways that might not be clear to the respondent, it is therefore crucial that the researcher is familiar with the behavior patterns and characteristics of the population to be surveyed (Lecompte Schensul 2010:84). Other crucial parts are the language and patterns of speech which also have to be used in the way that will be understood by the people answering the questions. If the interviews lack this construct validity they may not work for the study (Lecompte Schensul 2010:85).
5.2.1 Research Material
My main empirical material is the three interviews with gay Muslims who decided to live openly their sexual identity in their communities and also practice Islam. Two of them are imams who carry out work with the Islamic community and at the mosques while aware of their sexuality and who they are. The third person is a practicing gay Muslim, a scholar who dedicates to write about this issue.

When conducting the interviews I have used the interview method of semi structured interviews which means that my questions have been open ended but with a written list of the questions and the specific topic which needed to be covered. This way of conducting interviews is based on a prior plan where the questions are set up in certain order, but where you allowed the interviewed to express in their own way and terms (Russell 2011). By using this method of interviewing there is a minimum control over responses which may also result in the possibility to create other questions of interest during the interview that could be helpful for the study. This opportunity also permits to add the same question for others participants. I believe that semi structured interviews fits for case studies where you wish to get the knowledge on the lived experience of an individual.

The negative aspect of conducting an ethnographic study with semi structured interviews is that there is a risk of broadness in the type of answers given if compared to a structured interview. If structured interviews would have been made instead there would have been a possibility of getting more concrete answers and details when comparing the responses from the individuals. Other available methods in which this study could have benefited from is interviews by questionnaires and a case study. But so far remaining in the qualitative aspect due to the possibilities of gaining insights from interpretations that quantitative methodologies are not able to offer, specially for this type of concern in social analysis and issues, of course, without discrediting the strengths of quantitative methods.

In order to obtain fully insight of this concern, I will employ additional research material consisting of secondary resources of books, websites and a documentary that contains interviews and statements made by gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims. This last, refers to a British
documentary called *Gay Muslims (2006)* by Cara Lavan carried out with Muslims who are gay and lesbians, both that are open about it and those that are living hidden. When looking at the documentary I will focus on how the individuals describe their feelings about their sexuality and their relationship with Islam, family, friends and the community. The documentary source is Chanel 4 a public broadcaster that aimed to bring awareness on this subject.

I will then complement with the book *Living out Islam: Voices of gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims (2014)* by Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, a professor of South Asian and Islamic Studies who travel the world and talked to gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims. Likewise, I will concentrate on their experiences, answers and reflections. These two sources provide with most of the remaining material in comparison to our last resource. Lastly, I will evaluate the LGBT Muslim website islamandhomosexuality.com. In this platform, a participant engages in conversations and forums anonymously and is used as a method of expression that is important for our purpose. To these three parts I will apply the lens of identity theory. The reason for applying these secondary data is based on the difficulties of finding enough participants for conducting interviews, due to the sensitive subject. I found the documentary and this specific book being relevant because they also include the lives of lesbian Muslims which I was not able to do with the interviews that are all three male. It is important to also highlight the experiences of lesbian Muslims to not generalize the lived experiences from only one perspective. I also found this documentary relevant because it portraits the difficulties of growing up in a western country as both Muslim and LGBT which is important for my study and relates highly to the theory. All though, an important notion to be made is the limitations of using secondary that which is that not all information may be at use or always relevant for the study and it is therefore important, if using secondary data, to vary it to different kinds.

This part of the analysis will consist of a total of 18 stories and reflections from different individuals, 10 of them from the book with the interviews made by Scott Kugle, 6 of them from the British documentary and 2 of them from the website islamandhomosexuality.com. All individuals comes from an upbringing that was Islamic, either by culture, religion or both with parents or grandparents that has moved from their home countries to settle in a new country. There are 5 individuals with a background from Pakistan, 5 with a background from India, 2 with a background from Morocco and Algeria and 2 from Palestine.
There are also 4 individuals whose origin could not be specified due to the wish of being anonymous and the ones from the LGBT website whose origin is not stated. I will not be specifying country of origin in the analysis I will focus on what individuals speaks about in a context relating to either their religious identity or sexual identity since the study has a main focus on the personal experiences.
Each individual's statement will be cited to which one of these three parts it comes from and I have chosen the statements that I consider appropriate for the analysis and to best address the research questions. I have therefore done a selection and not followed up in a chronological order for each individual. My analysis will then be divided into two different sections, one consisting of these three parts previously mentioned and the second one consisting of the interviews I carried out with the three different individuals.

5.2.2 Presentation of the interviews
Initially, a presentation of each individual will be disclosed along with the reasons why I have chosen them for my research and interviews. I will then proceed with a description of how we established contact and how it developed throughout the study.
When deciding who to interview I was looking into finding individuals who had taken a different path that would not be seen as a traditional one. I have chosen three different individuals who are all living openly as gay Muslims but all with different backgrounds. In order to get deeper answers and larger variety I have asked the questions in a free way, which means that some questions have not been asked to all of them but are questions that has arise from an answer were I saw the possibility to elaborate. One of the individuals in the interviews has been interviewed in a previous work that I have done and his responses will therefore differ somewhat from the others.

Dr Shanon Shah PhD
As I mentioned in the introduction, I am following up on a study made by Shanon Shah and he is also one of the individuals who I have been interviewing. He is a Malaysian British Muslim, born in Malaysia who lives openly as a gay man, both in the UK and the Malaysian society and within his closest family. He has done studies in Asia regarding homosexual Muslims and I therefore found it interesting to contact him for the interview as he himself has knowledge in the
subject. He is a practicing Muslim himself and currently lives in the UK where he works as an assistant lecturer at the University of Kent.

**Imam Ludovic Mohamed Zahed**

Ludovic Mohamed Zahed is a French Algerian imam who I got familiar with after reading about his presence during the Swedish pride festival where he gave blessings to homosexual Muslims who wanted to get married with an Islamic ceremony. He is the first imam who is openly gay in France and who also created an all inclusive mosque in Paris where men and women pray next to each other instead of in separate rooms. He is also the founder of the group homosexual Muslims of France. He was born in Algeria but later moved to France with his family. I found it interesting to interview him as he can give the perspective of being a gay Muslim in the west with a different cultural background. He lives today in the French city of Marseille.

**Imam Daayiee Abdullah**

Daayiee Abdullah is an American imam who opened the first inclusive mosque in Washington D.C in the United States. He converted to Islam at a young age and when he made the choice of converting he was already living openly as a gay person. It was for this reason that I found it very interesting to interview him in order to hear his reasons for choosing Islam as the religion he wanted to convert to and how this can work with his sexuality.

### 5.2.3 Contacting the participants

With all three individuals that I conducted interviews with the contact has remained through email and Facebook during several occasions. I chose to contact them this way as it increased my likelihood of getting a response. Being a sensitive subject within Islam and for the individuals themselves, I knew that there was a probability of not receiving any answers. With all of them living in different countries this was also the best way to perform the interviews as I did not have the possibility of travelling to each country.

In total I contacted seven different individuals and got a response from three of them. All three of them are openly gay and will therefore be sited with their real names throughout the study which they have all agreed to.
One interview, made with Imam Daayiee Abdullah has been made through a Skype phone call after having contact through email; this was of preference for him due to a busy schedule. The interview was written down in a word document in the exact way as the questions were given and also answered in order to not leave any important information out. The second interview, made with Shanon Shah has been done entirely through email where I sent the questions in the order given by numbering them.

The third interview made with Imam Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed has been made twice during two occasions. As I have previously written a biography of Zahed where I also conducted an interview with him I will be using the previous interview together with the additional questions that I asked him for this study. Since the first interview was made in purpose of writing a biography the questions and answers have been posed in a different way than the ones posed to Imam Daaiyee Abdullah and Shanon Shah except for the additional questions. Imam Ludovic Mohamed Zahed have also done many similar interviews before so upon asking him the questions he gave me access to his book and encourage me to first search for answers in the book and after come back with specific questions. He also gave me access to a document with answers from other interviews which is why some answers are constructed in a non direct quotation way but rather as a written text. All my contact with Imam Ludovic Mohamed Zahed has been remaining through Facebook. During my first interview with Zahed made on 8th of March 2016 he sent the answers in a word document. Our first contact remained between 29th of February 2016 until 9th of March 2016. All the other three interviews made with each one have been made between ongoing contacts between 27th of January 2017 until 30th of March 2017 when I received the last answers. I also saw this as the most useful way to conduct interviews as it gives the opportunity of the respondent to be anonymous if wished.
Chapter 6 Analysis part 1 – Personal interviews

This first chapter of the analysis will contain responses for our main three interviews that I conducted. Each interview contained seven to eight questions. I have divided this chapter in three subsections with the questions that were asked into three different sections where two questions will be analyzed in each one of the sections. The third section also consists of two additional questions that arise during my interviews.

Each person will be cited with their name. Within this first section I will examine the two first questions of how the reactions has been from their families when and if they made the choice of coming out. I will also examine the question of if they have ever questioned their faith because of their sexuality.

6.1. Sexual identity and personal faith

Do you live openly as a gay Muslim in your family and community? If yes, have you always had support or not and what were the reactions?

Shanon Shah was born in Malaysia but did his University studies in Australia and then moved to London in 2010 after working for a while in Malaysia. In London he belongs to many different communities that are both Muslim communities but also Christian, one of them being a local church where his partner is working as an Anglican priest. Shanon and his partner are both fully accepted among the congregation, and Shanons parents also accepts and knows his Christian partner.

“Yes my immediate family knows I am gay, but not my extended family. My family was not always supportive. It was quite difficult “coming out” to them when I was 19 (nearly 20 years old). But over time they have become very accepting.” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

Because of the vulnerability of living openly as a gay person in Malaysia Shanons family feels that the best for him is to stay in the UK. Based on this issue with security his family also prefers if he does not tell the extended family.
“They also know and love my partner. They'd prefer if I stayed in the UK, however, because they feel it is unsafe for me to live openly as a gay Muslim in Malaysia especially with a Christian partner. None of them would want me to tell my extended family” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

Ludovic Mohamed Zahed who is the first open gay imam in France was born in Algeria and first moved to France when he was around 1 years old. After that the family went back and forth between Algeria and France but left Algeria for good after the civil war had broken out and then settled permanently in France in 1997 when Ludovic was 17 years old (Zahed 2013). Ludovic says that since he was little he was always very shy and effeminate which led to that his family constantly gave him a lot of negative comments regarding his way of behaving. This has infiltrated large parts of how he viewed himself throughout his childhood.

He describes how his father did not see him as masculine enough while growing up and that he was constantly beaten by his brother that fought him on several occasions, and in the end this became too big of a burden to carry.

“It was too much” (Imam Ludovic Mohamed Zahed)

Ludovic’s reasons for coming out to his family was based on the discrimination he lived within both his family and from society. He says that the constant islamophobia and homophobia which he daily had to live was what pushed him to come out.

“I came out at the age of 21” (Imam Ludovic Mohamed Zahed)

To Ludovic’s surprise the most support came from his father that told the family that they all needed to accept him as he was from now on. His mother has been struggling more to accept his sexuality and was also the one that had a stronger negative reaction towards it when he came out. Today his family has accepted his sexuality.

Imam Daaiyee Abdullah, who is a convert to Islam and who converted many years after he came out with his sexual identity to his family, expresses that he always had the support from his parents since the beginning.
“Since I was 15 years old when I came out to my family I always had support. 1969, in that time it was instrumental, because we are talking about a time when it was not that supportive. Generally in this time, in the black community it was not available” (Imam Daayiee Abdullah)

Daaiyee consider himself being very lucky and when I asked for his parent’s response to his choice of converting to Islam he says that they were also positive towards that decision. Daaiyee neither had any hesitation about converting to Islam which could be in relation to the support he always had with him from his family when growing up.

“When we were younger my parents never told us what faith to have, just that it’s good to have one. So when I did tell them I was becoming a Muslim they were very interested to learn more about it” (Imam Daayiee Abdullah)

The different responses they all three lived after coming out to their families except for Daaiyee, shows a pattern of rejection at first that with time turned into acceptance. Ludovics emotional state drove him to act upon the choice of telling his family. Ludovics choice can be interpreted as when not finding the support from one's community or society one can also based on the facts of emotions, which in this case was negative, find a strategy to get rid of the negativity hence coming out to his family. In the case of Daaiyee who received full support for both his sexuality identity and religious choice indicates to be a crucial factor for his ability to live out his both identities without questioning them.

Have you ever questioned your faith because of your sexuality?

Since Daaiyee's situation differs as he converted after he already knew and had accepted his sexual identity, he says that he has never questioned his faith.

“I understand that when I came into Islam, while I was studying in China, I found Islam to be very welcoming to me as minority. I have never felt absent from it. So it was never a problem” (Imam Daaiyee Abdullah)
Daaiyee first came in contact with Islam while studying in China. He said he found their way of using Islam to be different from the other ones he knew and that he always felt welcomed to it. This was not the case for everyone; Shanon describes how he made the choice of becoming an atheist when realizing he was gay.

“When I came out at age 19, I also decided I wanted to become an atheist. I felt that Islam and all other religions were ridicules and cruel. But I discovered a website called Queer Jihad in 1997 which helped me see that there were other gay Muslims like me, struggling to reconcile their religion and sexuality”(Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

Shanon says he found atheism quite boring and that through the work of progressive Muslim activists that he found, it made him take the decision to remain a Muslim. Ludovic, on the similar hand describes how he left the religious life when discovering his sexuality as he thought he could not be a Muslim and gay. It was not until he decided to accept his sexuality as he found peace in having both identities.

Ludovic came to this final point where he draw the conclusion of that he did not want to reject his sexual identity as a gay man nor his religious life as a Muslim. It was after this that he realized he could maintain both of them side by side which he said gave him an inner peace.

As identity theory claims that one will endure their identity if it is supported by society around oneself, this interviews also shows from what Ludovic describes and what I mentioned in the first part, that having a negative experience also can endure one to choose to live out their identity. It correlates to the experiences we are faced to live which force us into taking certain decisions of which one of our identities is hierarchy to the others, hence what we feel we cannot be without. Their sexual identity can be identified as their high level identity which is seen as the one identity that is the most important one. The high level identity is the one that furthermore can create change in the lower level identity, in this case being their religion. This is because a high level identity helps us to put the standards of the low one (Burke Stats 2009).

This can be found in the situation where both Ludovic and Shanon first made the choice of leaving the religious life (categorizing the importance of the two identities) and making their sexual identity as a first priority.
From the perspective of Daaiyee who grew up with both the notion of that having any form of religion was being accepted in the family in combination with acceptance for his sexuality identity leaves no doubt from his side as both identities without issue can connect to each other. Shanon found a sense of belonging when discovering that there were others that went through the same situation like him that opened a possibility of living out the two identities side by side.

6.2. Homosexuality within Islam and personal views
Within this second section I will analyze the question of how they would argue for themselves of the legit of homosexuality within Islam, what Islam has meant to them and the role it has played in their lives.

How would you argue that homosexuality is legitimate in Islam?

Daaiyee Abdullah who found and converted to Islam after discovering his sexual identity tells me when I ask him about the story of the people of Lut in the Quran, that it does not have anything to do with homosexuality.

“It has nothing to do with it, in his particular instant, it has not to do with male and male sex, it has to do with male control that are raping innocent people” (Imam Daayiee Abdullah)

Daaiyee says that the view of the story of the people Lut that has been promoted is wrong, and that this has nothing to do with same sex relationship because the men in the story of Lut where heterosexual.

“Sexual orientation cannot be deemed to a sexual act, because the sexual act of heterosexual intercourse is the same sexuality as a homosexual, and heterosexual sex is not considered a rapist. So a man having sex with another man does not make him a rapist” (Imam Daaiyee Abdullah)

Here Daaiyee raises the question of intercourse; the act of intercourse is the meaning of penetration that has been specifically condemned within Islam regarding homosexuality.
Daaiyee mean that as penetration also occurs within heterosexual intercourse it cannot be condemned or other vice both heterosexual and homosexual intercourse should be equally condemned.

When the question is posed to Shanon about homosexuality within Islam he says it is not upon him to prove that homosexuality is legitimate in Islam. He continues by saying that the burden should rather be upon the homophobes and islamophobes to convince him that homosexuality is forbidden as he remain unconvinced.

“There is no record of the prophet Muhammad ever recommending anyone to be punished for ‘homosexuality “throughout his lifetime. The story of the people of Lut in the Quran is not about homosexuality per se’” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

Similar to what Daayiee Abdullah said, Shanon says that the sexual assault between males that is described in the story of the people of Lut is rather a situation where other kinds of grave injustice is being perpetrated such as highway robbery and inhospitality towards guests.

“There is no record of the prophet Muhammad ever recommending anyone to be punished for ‘homosexuality “throughout his lifetime. The story of the people of Lut in the Quran is not about homosexuality per se’” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

The main argument for both talking about the legitimacy of homosexuality in Islam and the one of it being forbidden is based on the story of the people of Lut. This is found on several occasions with all three and shows how interpretation of a certain text can give different meanings. This can also conclude that one cannot guarantee that the story of the people of Lut can relate to homosexuality or not.
What does Islam mean to you and how do you feel that Islam is actually an including religion for you as a gay Muslim?

I furthermore turned to the question of what Islam has meant to them and specifically posed the question of why Islam was a choice in front of other religion to Imam Daaiyee Abdullah who made an active choice of converting.

“One of the things that I found was the openness within the faith, and my reading of the quranic message made greater sense to me as an individual. My first Quran was in Chinese and Arabic, I read it in Chinese and it made sense to me.” (Imam Daaiyee Abdullah)

Daaiyee says he found the Islam that was being practiced in China to be more genuine than the one from Saudi Arabia that he was also familiar with. He said that while he was studying Arabic in the Middle East he could notice how people often manifested the quranic ethics to the culture with certain rules, but very few seemed to live by those rules themselves. As he got a different impression from China, this was what caught his interest of practicing Islam himself.

“When I went to the mosque in Beijing, it was there that I found the community. It was different then the Saudi mosque I went to in Taiwan. I was introduced to families that had been Muslims for hundreds of years.” (Imam Daaiyee Abdullah)

The desire to find the true meaning of Islam was equally between them all. Ludovic Mohamed Zahed who first left the religious life said that he found his way back through Buddhism when he was searching for a new religion as he was thinking he could not return to Islam. Even though he thought Buddhism had good ideas it made him realize that it was Islam that he belonged to. All though he made the choice to leave the religious life when finding his sexual identity he ones as a teenager had a regular engagement in Islam. It was already at a young age that Ludovic started question himself and who he was.

At this time he did not understand what the feelings meant and he describes in his book Queer Muslim Marriage (2013) how he asked himself questions such as how can we as humans be asked to chose between our body and mind? Why don’t they both work together as one? (Zahed 2013) Ludovic therefore turn to the Salafi brotherhood as a young teenager while living in
Algeria. The Salafi brotherhood is seen as an extreme form of Islam that wanted to restore the purity of Islam, and Ludovic's family was not content with his choice to join but did not resist. He said that they gave him a sense of community and belonging and that they used to stay up late at night drinking tea and talking about the Quran. It was in the search of a “new family” that he joined the brotherhood since he felt left out from his own family. The breaking point came when the family left Algeria as the civil war broke out and he saw this as a sign and after that left the brotherhood.

Shanon who had a similar story about leaving the religious life when discovering his sexual identity took the decision of reading the Quran himself, from the beginning until the end.

“When I was wondering whether to become an atheist or remain a Muslim, I decided to read the Quran for myself in its entirety. So it was actually through re-reading the Quran for myself that I also came to see that I had a perfectly legitimate place within Islam and that it really didn’t have anything to say about homosexuality per se.” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

By reading the Quran entirely Shanon could more easily reconcile his identity as a Muslim with his sexual identity as a gay person when confirming that homosexuality did not have an illegitimate place within Islam and the Quran.

“Islam provides me a guide to think about the world and my place in it. It gives me resources to comfort me when I’m feeling fearful or depressed and to challenge me when I’m not being as ethical as I should be. It inspires me to achieve social justice while also communing with the divine” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

The wish for acceptance, not only from family and society was also of high importance to receive from their religion. Ones they had found an explanation of Islam and homosexuality they could reconcile being both a practicing Muslim and identify themselves as being gay. Each identity need some form of recognition in order for an individual to self find acceptance towards it.
6.3. Inclusion, discrimination and gender differences
Within this last and third section I will be analyzing the questions of inclusion in the general LGBT community and if they as gay Muslims have felt welcomed. I will continue with the question of discrimination and if they have lived discrimination from non Muslim gays and lesbians within the LGBT community. As a third question I will look into the gender differences to see if gender has an effect and therefore posed the question of if the view of lesbian Muslims is different than gay Muslims (in the Islamic community) according to them. During the interview two separate questions that were not on the list arise while talking to Imam Daaiyee Abdullah and Shanon Shah which I have also included in this section.

As identity theory claims how we as humans possess multiple identities that need to find a balance to coexist I found it to be important to ask about the feeling of inclusion within the LGBT community as a religious person. This question was also the one that was most split between them.

Do you feel included in the general gay/lesbian community as a gay Muslim?

“Yes and I feel closer to people having the same humanistic values and not the same religion or sexual orientation than Muslims/Gays being homophobic/racist” (Imam Ludovic Mohamed Zahed)

For Ludovic the most important aspect of inclusion was the question of someone’s values. All though religious background and sexual orientation was not important, the fact of having the same values shows the importance of a common ground in order for an individual to feel included or connected to others. For Daaiyee Abdullah it was the complete opposite.

“Well it depends, within the religious gay community yes, but the other one, no. There are a lot of islamophobia, just because they are gay it doesn’t prevent them from being islamophobic.”(Imam Daaiyee Abdullah)

Here we can identify that there exist different groups even within a community that can be divided. This feeling was also shared by Shanon Shah that says that he sometimes finds it harder to be a Muslim among LGBT individuals rather than progressive Muslims that he knows.
This tells that both Daaiyee and Shanon found it harder to integrate their identity as a Muslim within the LGBT community rather than their identity as a gay person within the religious community and the religious gay community. In the general LGBT community there are shown to be less religious individuals who therefore has a harder time identifying with someone that practice a religion as a gay or lesbian person based on the issues they have been facing within the religious community.

“I feel there are large sections of the white, secular gay/lesbian community in the west that are incredibly ignorant about religion, specifically about Islam. Among these sorts of people I do find it harder to express myself as a Muslim compared to expressing my gay identity among the progressive Muslims I know. The majority of the hardcore secular LGBT individuals I have met seem to look down upon anyone who has a religion” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

Both Daaiyee and Shanon describes the issue of feeling excluded as a connection to the religious aspect and the fact of that they practice their religion. The foundation of a community is based on that the individuals share equal or the same aspect of a certain subject or cause. The LGBT community is portrayed as being more diverse in this matter but the specific subject of religion has been considered as a sensitive topic.
This could be based on, as mentioned above, that many individuals who identifies as homosexuals have been feeling repressed by different religions while trying to express their sexual identity which has left them with a negative view of religions in general (Kugle 2014).

“Having said that, I do have many non-Muslim LGBT friends and allies in Malaysia and Britain, I’ve already mentioned that my partner is Christian. Our relationship works wonderfully, so I am also careful not to stereotype all white, western LGBT people! I think it’s also because we both have quite nuance views about religion and spirituality. He does not think Christianity is the only true religion and I don’t think that about Islam either.”(Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

Shannot’s description of having a nuance view towards religion and spirituality may correspond to the factor of culture and personality where he have characterized his religious identity within the role he obtains in the society he lives in, which in this case being the UK.
The most interesting response was of the question if they have ever felt discriminated by non-Muslim gays and lesbians.

Within their responses one can see a connection to the culture and personality identity and further try to answer the question of: Is it our environment and society that most affect us and our thoughts or are our personalities and culture balanced and interdependent of each other?

Have you ever felt discriminated by non-Muslim gay/lesbian people?

“Of course since LGBT people are just like anybody else and could feel the need to use racism against scapegoats to calm down their phobias” (Imam Ludovic Mohamed Zahed)

“If I go to Market Street in San Francisco, where gay people are, they look at me as the black man and not as their gay brother. The things people carry with them has nothing to do with their sexuality but how they see their culture” (Imam Daaiyee Abdullah)

When looking at their responses one can identify different aspects of both culture and society being an affect and personality and culture being independent of each other. Ludovic Mohamed and Daaiyee describes LGBT individuals as not being affected by their sexuality when it comes to how they view homosexual Muslims, which would not be linked to the part of the culture and personality identity that regards environment and society as a cause, but rather the one of our personality and culture that are being interdependent of each other.

This means that their personality and identity as a gay or lesbian person does not affect them in their personal views of others but that they rather feel this way as a cause of culture which is an independent cause that we carry with us. All though, this could also indicate that they could have been affected by the culture that they obtained and by the society they find themselves surrounded by right now in which therefore can also be linked to the view of environment and society.

Not discriminated. Sometimes I feel like I have been “used”. For example when there was a lot of activism on same-sex marriage in the UK in 2013, I was asked by several white LGBT activists to give the “Muslim” perspective on panels discussing same-sex marriage. I didn’t feel like they were genuinely interested in my views – they just wanted a brown, gay Muslim to fulfill their diversity quotas” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)
Shanon expresses a feeling of being used by the white LGBT community. He found himself in a situation where his identity as a minority within the British LGBT community is being taken advantage of. This can be concluded based on the issues of LGBT individuals who come from a minority background which both includes religious minority and cultural minority that has not been highlighted or cared for in a larger perspective. In the case of Shanon he is both a minority in the sense of being a foreigner from Malaysia, but also a Muslim based on his Malaysian background and culture and his sexual identity is as a gay man. All of this adds up to being a minority within a minority.

I further turned to the question of differences in sexuality between men and women with the particular interest of looking into the different situation between male and female LGBT Muslims. Is there a difference?

Do you think the view on lesbian Muslims is different than gay?

“Well that depends on which perspective, if it comes from the culture, it doesn’t. Because of the issue of penetration it is not considered negative for women. But consider culture it will always be a problem” (Imam Daaiyee Abdullah)

Daaiyee firstly makes an emphasis on the cultural perspective as the main reason for both lesbian and gay Muslims. Ludovic Mohamed Zahed gives another view and mention that the reactions towards lesbians is more violent and comes in other forms of treats such as forced marriages.

“Violence against gay men especially effeminate ones tend to be more explicit against lesbians it is sometimes more violent but less confrontational which could make it worst in the end (forced marriages, rapes ect.)”(Imam Ludovic Mohamed Zahed)

Daaiyee brings up the matter of penetration which is described as a sin from the story of the people of Lut. The main argument resembles to what I earlier mentioned in the analysis of the act of intercourse that Daaiyee gave an example of regarding homosexuality in Islam.

The story of the people of Lut also concentrates in the role of homosexual men, not women.
Daaiyee rather points at the question of culture that is equally problematic for gay and lesbian Muslim. As culture is deeply rooted inside each society it is something that can remain unchangeable for either a long time or eternity. Shanon on the other hand, respond that the view of lesbian Muslim is different in the way that they also have to face the difficulties of being women.

“Yes, first of all, lesbian Muslims have to deal with misogynistic interpretations of Islam, too, not just homophobic interpretations. Also, because many of the more conservative or traditional Islamic authorities view women as inferior to men, being lesbian is simply seen as more trivial compared to being a homosexual male.” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

Shanon means that the traditional Islamic authorities with a view of women as inferior to men also has an impact on how women in general are being seen in the Muslim society which adds up to the difficulties one faces as a lesbian Muslim.

“In order to reform Islamic understandings of gender and sexuality, there is also a need to unpack the role of slavery in forming early Islamic interpretations of gender and sexuality” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

While talking to Daaiyee I posed the question of if there are many gay and lesbian Muslims who visit the mosque that he is the founder of and if the majority in that case lives their sexual identity openly or not.

Are there many gay and lesbian Muslims who visit the mosque and do the majority live with an open identity?

“Part of the problem, no matter religious background, is that the LGBT community comes looking for a connecting to their religious faith, as broken people. They come to look for salience and acceptance” (Imam Daaiyee Abdullah)

When the individuals arrives to the mosque many has lived rejection before taking the step of finding a community that they felt welcomed in.
“It takes a lot more work, and I find that in the Muslim community in this time, quite often, they don’t have the way to stick with the process, because of their lack of being out, or the issue of self esteem. There is not a community that supports them; therefore they don’t see the importance of it. They just want someone to tell them it’s ok to be who they are. And then they disappear. And it’s a cultural issue”. (Imam Daayiee Abdullah)

Daaiyee says that the ones that come just want someone to tell them that it is ok to be who they are, to find an acceptance in life. This correlates to the view inside identity theory that claims that individuals will obtain the courage and will to live out an identity when support is given.

As Shanon Shah is familiar with the subject and research on homosexuality within Islam I found it relevant to add an additional question. I asked Shanon who himself made several studies on gay and lesbian Muslims if he considered it to be easier or harder to grow up in a western society with a background from a Muslim country.

Do you think growing up as a gay/lesbian Muslim in a western country with a background from a Muslim country and culture can make it more difficult or make it easier?

“In the West, gay Muslims have the freedom to appeal to the values of equality and non-discrimination within liberal democratic states. Britain especially has quite a robust Equality Act that protects religious and sexual minorities and this does have an impact on how people view gay Muslims” (Dr Shanon Shah PhD)

Shanon emphasis the values of equality found in a democratic state. This can be an important factor for a gay or lesbian Muslim to obtain the ability and sometimes the courage to live out their identities completely. All though, the meaning of values can have several implications that Shanon explains further.

“However, there is also an overall climate where Muslims are constantly seen as potential terrorists and “traitors” to British values, which feeds into more pernicious Islamophobia and xenophobia. In this context, all Muslims – traditional, progressive, gay, straight, men and women – are potential victims of Islamophobia.”(Dr Shanon Shah PhD)
Here he talks about the British values that also have a negative effect on the general Muslim society. This can further be linked to the explanation of the feeling of exclusion from the general LGBT community as a gay or lesbian Muslim person. The differences in the values between the backgrounds of the LGBT community in Britain create barriers. This raises the question of how our identities connect to the values we have and if our values automatically considers being equal to who we are.

6.4. Discussion of analysis part 1

Three interviews were conducted with individuals all from a different background but with three specific characteristics in common; they are all men, gay and Muslims. After comparing their answers I could find similarities and differences in their responses which will be presented in the following paragraphs.

The main focus of the discussion is the interpretation of homosexuality within Islamic Law and the Quran based on their answers. The question that held the strongest similarity between them was the question of how they would argue for the legitimacy of homosexuality within Islam. The focus remained on the story of the people of Lut and how this was interpreted in multiple ways. This argument was specifically brought up by Imam Daaiyee Abdullah and Shanon Shah who highlights the question of the relation to injustice between people, for example; that the people of Lut did not treat the visitors as they did with their own habitants and from that point derives a discussion to the act of rape and inhospitality. Without direct mentioning of homosexuality in the Islamic text this creates the possibility of various interpretations in relation to the Sharia Law.

The Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad declares that Muslims must respect others and find mutual understanding between each other, these open doors for a more positive view towards homosexuality in the context of the Sharia Law. Although, the act of homosexuality isn’t approved, the behavior of homophobia towards others should not be accepted as it goes against the teachings of respect and mutual understanding. The only one that can judge individuals in relation to the Islamic Law and decide what action is considered right or wrong according to their moral perception is God.
What is notable is that the gravest act in the Quran when relating to a sexual act, is first of all the act of Zina which stands for “sex between a man and a woman that are neither married or that the woman is the man’s slave” (Ali 2006:57).

The problem thus does not lay specifically in the homosexual act itself but the lack of recognition of a legal relationship between the two individuals; therefore if one could construct a resemblance to a legal bond between two individuals of the same sex according to the laws of Sharia the legal aspect could be solved.

When it comes to the question of sexuality in relation to lesbians in the Quran, it does not explicitly mention the word lesbian. When looking at female homosexuality through the Sharia law in the Quran it presents a rule of “a woman doing with another woman something resembling what a man would do with her” (Ali 2006:77) This one’s again relates to the lack of a legal relationship but can also relate to the question of the sexual act of penetration that according to Imam Daaiyee Abdullah doesn’t consider being as negative for lesbian Muslims and has therefore been “overseen” leaving homosexuality with a focus towards male homosexuality.

Furthermore, according to the Sharia law, the requirements for a punishment to be carried out for the action of liwat (homosexual act between two men) the act needs to have been seen by four male witnesses that will then be willing to testify against the act. This law is applied by three of the four schools of thoughts leaving Hanafi with no punishment. In these cases the law is not as clear which makes it complex because of that the Islamic laws does not only come from the Quran but from other sources as well as, for example the Hadith (Kugle 2010). This leaves one to self make interpretations of its meaning. With Hanafi not giving punishment but consider homosexuality being illegal it can give an impression of that the act itself may not be faulty, if conducted while not being seen.

The same is concluded by the three other schools and their appliance of the Sharia Law with the large amount of witnesses of four, and only male. Nevertheless, these laws allow various interpretations when it comes to homosexuality, which further justify the arguments given by all three in the interviews. This part of the analysis has had a focus on how individuals managed to live openly as a gay Muslim and how the journey was like. This has therefore only given the perspective of an open life and what the consequences of that might be. I will continue in the next chapter with additional interviews with individuals who have distinct experiences.
7. Analysis part two - Stories of gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims

This second part of the analysis will consist of interviews found in the book by Scott Kugle, the British documentary Gay Muslims and the LGBT website islamandhomosexuality.com. I have further divided the chapter into two different sections.

7.1. The role of Islam
Within this first section I will look into the role that Islam has played in the individual's life when coming to an understanding of their sexual identity and how they choose to understand Islam within that context and the one of their own sexuality.

“My sexuality and my religion they are both integrated parts of me, I can't abandon one for the other.” (Farah, lesbian, British documentary)

“People pick and chose out of the Quran. I chose the good things; I don't believe my sexuality is doing any harm to anyone.” (Abdullah, gay, British documentary)

“As for my faith, it has always kept me going. It has given me the strength to oppose racism, sexism and all those other isms.” (Tamsila, lesbian, Kugle 2014:45)

“I thought if I threw myself into my religious studies then I would forget about being gay or that I would change. So after six years I realized it didn't work.” (Muhsin, gay, Kugle 2014:23)

There was recognition in regards their attitudes towards the role of Islam in connection the sexuality varied between them. While some chose to see Islam as strength for them to accept their sexuality others had the perception of a devotion that could possibly cure them from being a homosexual. At this point, it is possible to interpret this reaction as a way to deny and acknowledgement their sexuality as a part of their identity. There is also the need for them to justify that they can still be good Muslims regardless of their homosexuality. Furthermore, it is possible to recognize that the lack of support towards their identity will cause the suppression of their own will hindering to act accordingly on that identity.
“There is god, Allah, there’s your dad and there is your mom, they’re your three gods, and they are not happy with me” (Razeem, gay, British documentary)

“My Allah is always with me, my homosexuality and me being Muslim I have reconciled and I have absolutely no problem with that” (Adnan Ali, gay, British documentary)

“It’s just weird how Allah sort of throws at you the things you least expect, the things you least want. I would never dream of being gay. I used to think it’s wrong, it’s not right and now I am” (Nargis, lesbian, Kugle 2014:57)

There is an inner conflict accepting their sexual identity as a part of themselves without having to justify it. In an attempt to wanting to justify their sexuality some of the individuals sorted to Allah for an explanation and an answer. As the young woman Nargis explains, it is not something that she can do anything about because it is only God, Allah that can answer the question of why she has become the person she is. As mentioned above about the various statements given about being a good Muslim despite being homosexual, one is described by Mushin, a gay Muslim, as “We have very spiritual people among us. I pray five times a day, read the Quran, fast and attend mosque regularly “ (Muhsin, gay, Kugle 2014:25). He felt it is important to address that “one should not get sucked into the gay culture” and lose their Islamic identity, and their Islamic identity is what has arisen from their culture. Important elements of one's cultural identity are familial and social obligation (Schwartz, Luyckx Vignoles 2011) these are seen as central to an individual's cultural identity; therefore with Muhsins example it is shown how our choices can determine the cultural to which one identifies.

Tamsila, from the book by Kugle, grew up in a home where debates about religion were frequent and also encouraged. She describes how she was therefore prepared to face her family with the Quran when telling them she was a lesbian.

“I knew that it would involve a religious debate, because that's the way they are and that's the way I grew up. So I came prepared. I came with my Quran and had it all lined up with the story of Lut and my understanding of it.”(Tamsila, lesbian, Kugle 2014:48)
Despite this Tamsilas family still tried to convince her and did not accept her arguments. Instead, her parents tried to cite paragraphs from the Hadith and she was later thrown out of the house just to be let back home a while later. Tamsilas parents also tried to force her into a heterosexual marriage which she refused, and even though her parents have been arguing for that Islam does not accept homosexuality she describes her faith as being strong and that Islam is what has helped her through the tough times in her life.

Another example is Shakir, a gay Muslim who also participated in the British documentary. His parents were the only ones that agreed to be interviewed in the documentary but while being anonymous, not showing their faces with the fear of the reaction from their community. On the question of their son being gay the father answered “Maybe it’s because I have been a sinner, I have had sin of sex outside marriage, you see before I got married. My sins have now visited my son you see. That's why we have god punishing me” (Father of Shakir, British documentary). Shakirs father also uses Islam as an explanation to why his son has become gay and does not want to define being gay as a part of Shakirs identity but rather a punishment for his own actions in the past.

A participant from Kugles book of interviews lived a similar experience with his parents trying to undermine the meaning of his sexual identity when he told them he was gay, at the same time as they showed support as it being something temporary that would change later in life. Here similar to Shakirs parents there is a wish to not recognize their child's homosexuality as a part of their identity but in this case, as a phase.

“I was in my mid teens when I spoke to my parents for the first time about being gay. They were first wonderful. They said it was a natural part of puberty to be questioning your sexuality and it was something I would grow out of” (El Farouk Khaki, gay, Kugle 2014:186)

The hope that Islam will “cure them” from their homosexuality led to that many turned to deep studies and devotion within Islam. One of them is Fatima that was born a woman but has always felt that he is a man inside and also wanted to be sited as a male, and is a transsexual (Siraj al-Haqq Kugle 2014). He turned to Islam in order to try to escape these overwhelming feelings.
“I felt that I had something in me but I suppressed it. And as I was getting older, I had to suppress it even more, this is why, when I became nineteen, I turned to religion” (Fatima, transsexual, Kugle 2014:85)

The act of suppressing their feelings can be a reaction of feeling alone when not having a community or family to share their thoughts with and someone that can understand what they are going through. This causes one to turn to what is familiar to us which in Fatimas case was the religion.

“I told myself, now I don’t have to think about it anymore. I don’t have to solve the problem. Now the Quran and the sunna will do it for me. There must be a code of life for me that will explain and solve my problems! ” (Fatima, transsexual, Kugle 2014:86)

Fatima put all of his hope into that Islam would change his feelings of being a man inside his female body. When turning to religion the issue of his gender identity was currently suppressed at the same time as Islam provided a community. He describes his practices in Islam as an ideological manner to provide life with a structure, meaning and a purpose.

It is within this context that humans cultural identity, which one are born and raised into also characterize us as adults and shapes us according to what social patterns we chose to act upon as adults. Despite Fatimas attempt he said he did not manage to repress his identity.

“Amazingly with all of this I found time to fall in love, despite how active I was. She was a Pakistani girl. We manage to fall in love. I thought this cannot be happening! Why is this happening to me? I have a scarf and I pray and fast so why? ” (Fatima, transsexual, Kugle 2014:88)

The pattern of devotion to Islam was seen in several answers. Islam offered a safe haven where one could find the familiar, a group and a way to identify with this group. Discover their sexual identity was on the other hand the unfamiliar, and the lack of finding others that identified themselves as they created fear of being the only one and therefore the urgency to suppress their sexual identity.
“I guess that I was around fourteen or fifteen years old. I understood I was gay, but in the beginning I denied it and it was very difficult to accept. I did not want to be gay, that is why I started praying to god to make me straight” (Rasheed, gay, Kugle 2014:130)

“I spent so many hours praying and reading, in khushu and asking god all the questions, and asking god to help me, saying, god what is happening to me? ” (Osama, gay, Kugle 2014:140)

For others, the loyalty towards Islam was not only about their own beliefs but also what their families believed. In several situations, the issue has been what the community would say. This was specifically the case for Osama, a Palestinian refugee in The Netherlands.

“They knew that it is not allowed in Islam, that it is haram and all that. But the issue for them was the social control. They really had a lot of problems dealing with the neighborhood” (Osama, gay, Kugle 2014:144)

Osama found him wanting to help other gay and lesbian Palestinians and therefore agreed on speaking for ten minutes at a television show, with his face blurred. All though no one could recognize his face, his mother and family did. This spread throughout his community and caused his family being threatened by their neighbors. Osama’s sister was verbally attacked by her husband’s family (Siraj al-Haqq Kugle 2014:143) and this caused her husband to beat her, She was at the time pregnant and lost her baby. The family blamed Osama’s homosexuality for everything that happened.

“They felt that it was natural that I should be attacked” (Osama, gay, Kugle 2014:144)

Osama describes physical contact between men as frequent during the teenage years and that this was seen as a part of a teenage boy’s stage of becoming an adult. This corresponds to the historical view of homosexuality within Islam where young adolescents were not yet seen as men and therefore, the physical action was not considered as a homosexual act neither illegal (El-Rouayheb 2005). This assumption reaffirms the general view of homosexuality as not being a part of the human identity and rather a stage and behavior in life.
“It is not allowed, though it is tolerated. You know that it is happening but you don't talk about it, and at a certain age you have to stop” (Osama, gay, Kugle 2014:141)

Several of them also lived discrimination from their families in specific ways.

“ I think that the most hurtful part was when I visited my mother, she’d have a separate plate and a separate cup for me to eat from and drink from so I don't infect other people ” (Abdullah, British documentary)

The continuous negative reactions from family member’s highlights how they view their children or siblings sexuality as a choice they have made by themselves, hence one has to take the consequences that might come. There is a self recognition of that Islam has an unacceptable stance towards homosexuality. The low support also shows how for example Osama himself accepted these bad treatments and consider them legitimate in the beginning.

In the British documentary, the chairman of the British support group for LGBT people Imamaam was interviewed during pride festival in London regarding her questions of Islam and homosexuality. She wears a hijab, her voice is changed for the documentary and she does not want to be sited with her real name, she is cited as “Rasheeda “. She claims it is a un-Islamic notion to be proud of your sexuality and does not participate in the pride parade. Your sexuality is not something you're proud of, it just exist. Rasheeda means that no matter one's sexuality, being a good Muslim is essential.

The ones that decided living out their sexuality rejected Islam completely in the beginning as a reaction. When finally reaching acceptance of them, many turned once again to Islam but still with the fear of rejection from their community. They viewed themselves as Muslims by the cultural influence and therefore look for others on that level. The two system view within culture and personality believes that culture and personality interacts and balances one another instead of having one's personality as an intervening variable. They are therefore seen as independent from each other. This was the case for Adnan Ali from the British documentary. He had reconciled with his sexuality and believed that Allah loved him as he was and he found himself having a balance between his religion and sexual identity that he saw as separated from each other.
These men and women who participated in Kugles book and the documentary had reached a certain stage in their sexual identity where they felt that they could speak more openly about it and had come to the point where they wanted to express it. When looking at the LGBT Muslims website, the situation looked different with many interacting in the comments by using anonymous names and others with their real ones.

“My name is Micah I am a transgender M to F and I am looking for a safe place to be a Muslim in the state of Ohio. Please I need help.” (Micah January 22 2016, LGBT website)

“Hi I’m looking for a group to join for social awareness of being gay and Muslim which is very hard to do in a very cultural family. I wish I could release my inner feelings but my family, I don’t know how they would react so I don’t have any real outlet to speak to someone who understands me, can you please add me to your weekly newsletter regarding new and upcoming events held in Canada?” (Mohammed Muneer July 26 2015, LGBT website)

Others wrote a rather large text wanting to express their feelings that they most likely could not do anywhere else openly. The difference between Micah Mohammed Muneer is that Micah rather expresses fear and is asking for help while Mohammed is looking to join a group to have someone to talk to. Mohammed also uses the term cultural when speaking about his family in a way that indicates an obstacle for him to live out his sexual identity. Micahs fear can also indicate that he might be looking for protection from family as transgender suffer a higher possibility of being threatened.

7.2. Identity and Culture
Within this second, also being the last section I will focus on the individual's experiences with their personality and cultural identity after discovering their sexual identity and how this has affected their daily life. I will also focus on the female and male point of view of being a homosexual Muslim and how and if their experiences might differ through both a personal and cultural perspective.

One that had a hard time reconcile with his sexual identity and the Muslim community was Razeem from the British documentary. He never revealed his real name or identity during the interview and did not show his face.

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“I have bad experiences going out as gay in the gay community. There is a lot of racism in the gay community. It’s hard to be a Muslim and then you have to be gay on top of that. ” (Razeem, gay, British documentary)

“The white gay community wants me to come out basically. They want me to be proud of it. And the Asian community, I feel is trying to keep me inwards inside my shell and are trying to change me, I feel they are both competing for me and that I am in the middle. ” (Razeem, gay, British documentary)

Here we can identify the issues found within the gay community itself. Even though Razeem would have reconciled with himself to these two identities, the absent within the gay community to acknowledge and accept his religion and culture as a part of his identity would still have affected how he would chose to express it. This is a situation where the role identity can be applied; Razeem feels the need to choose one of these identities as he neither has the support from the Muslim community or the gay community to simultaneously combine the two identities. This also corresponds to the salience hierarchy, where the social structure surrounding us will be a dependent clause of our actions and behaviors. The salience hierarchy can be specifically applied when Razeem says “I feel they are both competing for me and that I am in the middle”. This indicates that he has to make a decision based on the pressure he lives from the two different communities. In the end of the documentary Razeem expressed the loneliness he felt and said that he has realized being gay and Muslim meant you could never be happy.

“I have known many people that has given up. They got married because they realized they would never be accepted in the gay community because we are Palestinians and we are Muslims. So that’s what I am going to do. I will go home and do exactly that. ” (Razeem, gay, British documentary)

One can see the struggle between his cultural identities within the Muslim community interfering with his sexual identity but also that he feels left out by the gay community. As his identity as a gay Muslim is not recognized or given, which in this case was because of the lack of support from both communities, the Muslim and the gay community he made a choice. Razeem felt he was left to make a choice between the two identities and choose to do what was expected of him within the Muslim community.
“One of the difficult parts of coming out as a Muslim or in any religious tradition is the religious condemnation and the religious interpretations of text which demonize same-sex relationship. As a believer, that was a problem for me” (El Farouk Khaki, gay, Kugle 2014:187)

El Farouk who has seen himself as a believer describes how one has to struggle with their own beliefs as getting condemnation from family and community. All though, he have seen change and gives an example that happened during a discussion at the Toronto’s gay and lesbian community center where a heterosexual Muslim woman dressed in a hijab participated. El Farouk expressed the rareness of this and how this would not have happened ten years ago. El Farouk means that after 9/11 that forced the Muslim society into the center of attention it created a movement of progressive Muslims, one that LGBT Muslims where a part of.

Many of the women who were interviewed expressed, as a female Muslim, a different treatment than the one given to their brothers, if having any. This made it hard for them to live out their sexual identity as they felt that they were not only being suppressed by their families and communities for being lesbians but also how they were restrained because of being women.

“We were given information about how you should live your life and what was expected of you, but it all came from a cultural perspective. The cultural and religious got all mixed up together” (Rasheeda, lesbian, Kugle 2014:177)

“I feel that I’ve been constantly coming out, I’ve suffered somewhat from depression, from going through the highs and lows of coming out” (Tayyaba, lesbian, Kugle 2014:72)

“I didn't read anything in the Quran that told me what my parents said about my role as a woman, as a female, as a wife” (Rasheeda, lesbian, Kugle 2014:179)

Both Tayyaba and Rasheeda came from families where their roles as women were explained to them at a young age and what was expected of them. Rasheeda described how she never questioned what her mother told her until she realized she was a lesbian and wanted to find out the truth about what Islam really said.
She realized, what she explained above, that the culture had gotten so integrated into the religion that a major part of what her mother taught her about Islam was something she could not explain to her at a larger context. Whenever Rasheeda asked her mother about something in the Quran or regarding prayers the answer was always the same, “because god says so, it’s just how it is suppose to be“.

Others had instead families that had a tight connection to the rest of the Muslim community which also made it more limited to live out their sexuality. This was the case for Nargis who grew up in an Indian community in South Africa.

“My mother hit me a lot. She was the one beating me up, not my father. Everyone was sitting around there and she was beating me up! Basically I had to go around and ask my whole family for forgiveness for being who I am” (Nargis, lesbian, Kugle 2014:60)

After Nargis made the choice to come out to her family, her freedom that before had been limited was even more strangled, this was specifically based on her gender, according to Nargis. As her family also had a strong connection to the rest of the Muslim community there was always someone watching her, even at University. While she tried to keep meeting the girlfriend she had met in secret her friends started reporting back to her parents of what she was doing. Her family threatens to take her out of University if she did not stop seeing the girl that was her girlfriend.

“There was a point when I was in a little bit of depression. I did feel like I needed to kill myself at one stage, because I didn’t know what to do, feeling stuck here. Since then I have been just moving forward. ” (Nargis, lesbian, Kugle 2014:68)

When Nargis confronted her father about being a lesbian the response was rather different. As she asked him if he understood the meaning of being a lesbian, a homosexual, he answered yes but that only men could be homosexuals, not women. This highlights a difference that can be found between the view of male and females when it comes to their sexuality. This also corresponds to the historical view of homosexuality within Islam that was regarded as an act by men.
Farah, the lesbian woman from the British documentary has not been given acceptance from her family and therefore had to move out. On the attempt to explain this to her mother, she got as a response that as a good Muslim she should have killed herself instead of making the choice of living as a lesbian, because that would have been less of a synd.

Farah wanted to prove to her mother that she could be a lesbian and a good Muslim and did not drink alcohol and prayed every day. Despite her wanting to attend to the London Pride Festival she followed the advice from the chairman of Imaan, LGBT organization, so she did not participate in the festival.

"I wanted to go. But I think it's all the 'you shouldn't be proud of what you are, you should be asking for forgiveness'. I wish I could do that for my family. If I had the choice of being straight I would" (Farah, lesbian, British documentary)

One can conclude that there is an existing different between the view of the female and male sexuality to be found. The largest difference lays in the view of a woman's sexuality not being acknowledged in the same way as for a man. Regarding the thoughts of homosexuality there is no difference to be found, being a lesbian woman or a gay man is both seen equally wrong.

Nafeesa who is a transsexual undergoing from male to female faced issues of stereotypes and gossips when she came out to her friends and family. Nafeesa says that it was very important for her own identity as a Muslim to keep contact and a close relationship to her Muslim friends and also to Islam.

"I am first of all a Muslim and my sexuality has got nothing to do with my religion. This is something for which I never needed any confirmation. It was an inside thing" (Nafeesa, transexual, Kugle 2014:42)

Nafeesa wants to separate her sexuality from her religion and see them as two separate entities that do not affect each other.

The pressure from families and what is expected of children was not only applied to the women but also when growing up as the only son in a family, as was the case for Aziz. He grew up in the Indian Muslim community in South Africa and was the only son of five children.
“My dad's idea was that you are the only son in the family, so you will go and study medicine, become a doctor and make our family proud” (Aziz, gay, Kugle 2014:197)

Aziz had the fear of disappointing his father by not filling up his wishes regarding a certain career but also that he was expected to get married and create his own family.

“I think that it does have to start at the level of community, family and friends. But they come back to you and say “the imam says in the Quran it is not acceptable” so people still place a lot of emphasis on what the imams say and they even control the minds and hearts of the families” (Aziz, gay, Kugle 2014:204)

Aziz believes that it has to come from the community and family in order for a possibility of change. The deep root of culture has a higher chance of changeability if it is done on a group level with several people from the same community involved. This could create an influence where important individuals within a community are the ones to bring up the matter that is unknown to the community to bring trust towards the new situation. One example of this could be through the imams that possess such high influence on the community. Here we can also identify that the role of the culture pressure can be considered equal between male and female Muslims that was also mentioned during my interview with Imam Daaiyee Abdullah.

7.3. Discussion of analysis part 2
The first part of the analysis has looked into the different stories and experiences of gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims. The answers given in the analysis provided an understanding of how participants find not only reconcile their identities but expose sometimes their justifiable relationship to Islam. In this second discussion, I will focus the discussion around culture as its a main factor and identity which is referred to for the secondary cases.

In the analysis, it was possible to notice that the manners how individuals were raised and the external situations they encountered while growing up had a potential influence reflected in the reactions to the knowledge of their sexual identity. For example, Tamsila who was raised to learn to debate about religion and to question arguments that did not convince her, showed a strong will and courage to confront her parents in favor of her sexual identity.
By contrary, participants from families with conservative and strict religious interpretations tended to non question the ideas of Islam in regards homosexuality.

Another nuance found in the secondary cases was that these individuals sorted to Islam when they became aware of their sexual identity in order to suppress it. While in our first hand cases, Imam Ludovic Mohamed Zahed and Shanon Shah described a reaction of isolation and rejection towards Islam when attempting to reconcile terms with their sexuality. This difference indicates that Zahed and Shah had already accepted their sexuality and imposed their sexual identity over others. The theory helps us to interpret this last phenomenon because it shows clearly that first; personality is directly affected by an identity culture which is formed when we grow in a determined environment also evidenced in the cases exemplified above, So that, personality signifies an intervening variable and the importance of our study in analyzing personality and culture together. And second, that the salience of hierarchy becomes also more evident by showing the prominence of a sexual identity over a religious identity, but a cultural identity that reconcile according to each different case. This last statement contributes to indicate that despite cultural identity lays at the core of the formation of our judgments it closely depend on the identity roles we play in society, this means, social roles that are associated with specific and more secondary roles.

Therefore, identities that are found to be more crucial are those deeply connected to our personalities, those that help us achieve our individual potentials and influence our overall identity the most. For our study, sexual identity is one of the crucial identities in comparison to the others because sexuality determines how participants express emotionally at a personal level and so are at a higher place in the hierarchy of the different identities. Sexuality is engaged with our feelings of desires and how we relate to other people (Kugle 2010).

This further explains the strong will of individuals to challenge their families and communities in order to gain the acceptance of their sexuality. Cultural identities, mainly acquired in primary socializations, hold a special position in another dimension, one that concerns judgment of action and moral and one that impacts social behavior and belief systems.
Moreover, I suggest in reference to the analysis that due to the nature of cultural identities; a socialized and external nature, participants instead prefer to position identities that are closer to the individual, to the personality, and personal interest in a higher position of relevancy.

Lastly, it shows that religion identity is constituted at a initial level of the formation of cultural identity identity, however, sexual identity play a more determinant role.
Chapter 8 Conclusion
Despite the recent formation of several support groups and organizations for LGBT Muslims, the majority still confront discrimination from their communities. This study had the general objective of illustrating and analyzing the struggle faced by gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims, and, a more specific objective of examining deeply the dynamics between a religious identity and a sexual identity. In effect, the purpose entailed to reveal how these individuals argued in favor of Islam as a religion that does not reject homosexuality, or in other words, how they resorted to Islam in order to support homosexuality. Throughout the discussion, a compelling question raised regarding whether lesbian Muslims and their experiences on sexual identity were any different than those of men. With this in mind, three openly gay Muslims; who strongly represented our research inquiry and provided valuable insights to our investigations due to their knowledge of Islam, were interrogated in semi structured interviews. Meanwhile, additional interviews were available from secondary resources to complement with material the coverage for the latter question.

The analysis confirmed the existence of perceptions of disadvantage and intolerance towards LGBT Muslims within the Islamic society. It introduces us to a primary finding in that such a rejection has a further and negative impact which creates a repression of Muslims sexual identity and most importantly, it lingers the process of self-acceptance decreasing the possibility of a reconciling relationship between their faith and sexuality. In fact, when such a relation entered in conflict it was revealed that firstly; some individuals either used Islam as a tool of immersion to deny their acceptances as homosexuals or they completely abandoned religious practice. And secondly, those other individuals who chose Islam as a tool of immersion to understand their sexuality. Although the different backgrounds, studied interviewee shared the same struggle when it concerned the formation and acceptance of their identity. But Muslims, who had reconciled with their sexual identity, were also able to reconcile their religion with their sexuality based on an available platform, an internal community of individuals like themselves. A second and relevant finding concludes that LGBT Muslims confronts a problem of double discrimination.
The majority of gay and lesbian support groups are non-religious, exception of some rare founds, mainly Christian or Jewish. The lack of LGBT groups of Islamic faith makes this support platform less suitable for recognition and creates the danger of being a minority within a minority. The interviewee immigrated to a country where Muslims are already a minority and with it Islam a minority religion. Surprisingly, it indicates the presence of fear if their faith, Islam or religious identity is downgraded to give a place for their sexual identity.

Furthermore, this analysis suggests that lesbian Muslim encounter a greater challenge than that of a common patriarchal society when it concerns their sexual identity. Independence within the community, gender-based limitations, and biased interpretations of women’s unquestionable role towards men and women’s lesser appreciation by ultra conservative Islamic authorities, are supplementary obstacles that impact the road to acceptance of a sexual identity and faith.

Overall, gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims challenged their families to tolerate their sexual identity instead of isolating them. The purpose was then to reconcile family life, community integration and acceptance of sexuality.

After these findings, the study clearly portrays a debate between structures opposite to agency, one where both internal and external factors will determine if sexual identity will combine with a religious identity as Muslims. If the external support provides with a safety net, LGBT Muslims will count on an even transition to acceptance and identity reconciliation. In this sense, personality and culture are reciprocal to each other, which signify that the concept of personal mediation dominates as we could see that their personalities and sexualities are an intervening variable to their culture. This is based on that their personalities and notion of their sexuality affected their cultural institute of religion. This study calls upon further research into the insights of the families and how they have coped with the situation and to identify their relationship and conception towards homosexuality and Islam, in order to, examine their justifications in comparisons to those provided by the participants in this study. This type of research would allow the introduction of a common understanding between the stragglers participants and their families to the benefit of their own identities.
**Biography list**


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